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New Microsoft data center agreement cash cow city, schools

BY STAN MADDUX

What was described as historic levels of new funding in the tens of millions of dollars a year will be coming to the city and schools in La Porte from a renegotiated agreement with Microsoft over its upcoming construction of a data center.

The money stems from a decision by Microsoft in January not to seek property tax relief on its projected $1 billion investment in La Porte and other data centers the technology giant builds elsewhere.

"We're committed to being a good, responsible neighbor and we'll pay our full and fair share of local property taxes, adding revenue to local towns and cities," said Mike Stockwell, a Microsoft land development and permitting program manager.

Stockwell was among three other Microsoft representatives at a Tuesday press conference to announce the new deal.

Officials in La Porte were pleased with the original agreement from June of 2024 that called for the city and school corporation to share about $2.5 million annually over a 40 year period.

At the time, Microsoft was planning to seek tax abatement on the very costly equipment inside the facility but pay full property taxes on the building and the nearly 500 acres of farmland the data center will go up on along Boyd Boulevard just east of U.S. 35.

The new agreement calls for the city to collect 85 percent of Microsoft's entire property tax bill with the remaining 15 percent going to the school corporation over 20 years.

Officials did not release specific figures, preferring to wait for the facility to be assessed once it's constructed before estimating the total amount of new property tax funding.

However, City Councilman Tim Franke said the yearly property tax collections from Microsoft has the potential to "double or triple" the city's annual $30 million budget.

"If you do the math, it's a significant amount of money. We'll see how it all shakes out," he said.

La Porte Economic Advancement Partnership Executive Director Bert Cook called the influx of new funds "unlike anything we've seen before."

Franke said it was Microsoft that approached the city about striking a new deal, which was given final approval Tuesday by the city's Redevelopment Commission and school board.

La Porte Schools Superintendent Dr. Sandra Wood said the amount of new revenue for the school corporation from Microsoft was the maximum allowed by the state for educational programs.

She also described the new agreement as "significantly more lucrative" than the previous deal and the amount of new funding it contains "unprecedented for a public school corporation in our state."

Wood said there are no strings attached to the funding, which will be spent at the discretion of the school corporation.

Officials expect some of the funds to start being received in 2028 with full payment in 2029.

How the funds are spent will be decided later at some point.

But Mayor Tom Dermody said a lot of the city's money could go toward major needs such as repairing and upgrading infrastructure like streets that "we're going to focus on as much as possible."

"I think it will completely change our community," said City Attorney Nick Otis.

THE ACORN ACCEPTING SUBMISSIONS FOR SINGER/ SONGWRITER COMPETITION

Submissions are open for The Acorn's Singer-Songwriter Competition Finals, which is returning for its 14th consecutive year.

The deadline for entry is 1 p.m. Tuesday, April 28. Six Finalists will be selected to perform Saturday, July 18. An esteemed panel of judges and the beloved Acorn audience will participate as six finalists take the stage for this thrilling performance, with the field narrowing to the 'top three' artists over the course of two rounds.

Three video entries of original songs are required. Each song must have accompanying lyric sheets with song title and songwriter's name on each song. Submissions are evaluated on song structure, lyrics, musicality, overall appeal, and the ability of the performer to sustain a full-length show.

Full submission guidelines are detailed at The Acorn's website, www.acornlive.com, on the 2026 Singer-Songwriter Competition page. Finalists are considered for other Acorn shows and recommended for other area events. Cash prizes are awarded to the Top Six Finalists.

The Acorn presents quality performances year-round – local artists share new works, regional performers embrace the opportunity to springboard their careers, and renowned national and international artists reconnect with their art in The Acorn's intimate setting. — STAFF REPORTS

AI as a Service has a profound ability to efficiently enhance human intelligence in areas outside our expertise. The creativity that is brought to life by crossing this barrier is infinite, with Nature herself as the ceiling.
— Dino N. Fatouros

Local Government Meetings

New Buffalo Times

Democracy Requires Transparency

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VANCE PRICE, MAYOR
CITY COUNCIL
MARK ROBERTSON, ROGER LIJEWSKI, KAREN GEAR, RICH KNOLL, VANCE PRICE
City Council meets on the 3rd Monday of each month at 6:30PM
CITY OF NEW BUFFALO PLANNING COMMISSION MEETINGS
Meets on the 1st Tuesday of each month at 5:30PM
NEW BUFFALO TOWNSHIP BOARD
HOWARD MALES, MICHELLE HEIT, MICHELLE HANNON, PATTY IAZZETTO, BARBARA ANDERSON
Board meets on the 3rd Monday of each month at 4PM
NEW BUFFALO TOWNSHIP PLANNING COMMISSION
Meets on the 1st Tuesday of each month at 6:30PM
SHERIFF BERRIEN COUNTY
Sheriff, Chuck Heit
Undersheriff, Greg Sanders
NEW BUFFALO AREA RECREATIONAL AUTHORITY
Meets at 9AM on the 2nd Wednesday of every other month (odd) at New Buffalo Township Hall, 17425 Red Arrow Highway New Buffalo
NEW BUFFALO AREA SCHOOLS BOARD
LISA WERNER, JOHN HASKINS, DENISE CHURCHILL, JENNIFER SUMMERS, VANESSA THUN, STEPHEN DONNELLY, GREG VOSBERG
The Board meets on the 2nd and 4th Mondays of each month at 6PM
CHIKAMING TOWNSHIP
CHIKAMING TOWNSHIP BOARD
DAVID BUNTE, PAULA DUDIAK, LIZ RETTIG, RICHARD SULLIVAN, ARTHUR ANDERSON
Chikaming Board meets on the 2nd Thursday of each month at 6:30PM
CHIKAMING TOWNSHIP PLANNING COMMISSION
Meets on the 1st Wednesday of each month at 6:30PM
THREE OAKS
THREE OAKS TOWNSHIP BOARD
Meets on the 2nd Monday of each month at 7PM
VILLAGE OF THREE OAKS BOARD
Meets on the 2nd Wednesday of each month at 7PM
GRAND BEACH
Meets on the 3rd Wednesday at 5PM EST
KIMBERLY WOLNIK, CLERK-TREASURER
HARRY WALDER, JACK GRACE, ED SEBASTIAN, PETER DOERR, EDWARD BRANDES
MICHIANA
VILLAGE OF MICHIANA COUNCIL
Meets on the 2nd Friday of each month at 1PM

Elected official to remain on ballot in residency dispute

BY STAN MADDUX

A public official from northern La Porte County will be allowed to seek reelection after a failed bid to remove him from the ballot on allegations he doesn't live in the area he represents.

The La Porte County Election Board following more than three hours of testimony on Thursday, Feb. 26, ruled Richard Gramarossa met the minimum standards required by the state for establishing legal residency.

Gramarossa, a Republican, is running for a second four-year term on the Galena Township Board of Trustees in the May primary.

The vote was unanimous, but each member of the election board wasn't totally sold on Gramarossa's claims.

"I don't believe for one minute that Rich Gramarossa lives in Galena Township. However, proving that is a different story," said election board member Heather Stevens, a Republican, who's also the La Porte County clerk.

Even though there are a couple of concerning things, I don't think concerning things can over weigh the standard by which we have to address this," said election board member Julia Sinclair, who's the La Porte County Democratic Party chairperson.

The challenge was from La Porte County Republican Party Chairman Allen Stevens, who alleged Gramarossa lives 15 miles away in Michigan City with his wife, La Porte County Commissioner Connie Gramarossa.

Stevens called as a witness former La Porte County Auditor Tim Stabosz, who stated his check of past electric bills at the home Gramarossa claims to live had monthly charges of less than $10 a month.

Stabosz said he was the auditor when he sought copies of the bills from 2020 through 2023 while looking into whether the home qualified for a homestead tax exemption that was on the residence.

Only a primary residence is eligible for the homestead tax credit.

In response, Gramarossa, with help from his attorney, Christopher Cooper, produced copies of his electric bills last year from his Galena Township residence.

The monthly bills ranged from $36 to $60, which Stevens felt helped his challenge.

"Nobody in their right mind believes that this is actually what somebody that lived there full-time would spend on an electric bill," Stevens said.

Cooper also produced documents showing Gramarossa on Feb. 1 paid $580 for 200 gallons of propane to heat his residence.

Things like his driver's license and credit card accounts list the address of the home, Cooper said.

Stevens also presented the findings of what he described as an independent investigation last spring that showed Gramarossa's vehicle was spotted at his wife's Michigan City residence 48 times out of 71 observations.

Gramarossa said he sometimes parks his work truck full of expensive tools outside his wife's residence to guard against theft because of surveillance cameras throughout the neighborhood.

Cooper called the reported observations "absolute hearsay" after Stevens expressing fears of retaliation refused to identify the person behind the count.

Stevens invited the election board to pause the meeting so they could make the 20-minute drive to visit the residence for them to decide whether it's actually being lived in.

The election board turned down the request out of fear they wouldn't make it back in time because the state mandated deadline for making decisions on ballot challenges for the primary was about one hour away.

Cooper also expressed a desire to stay to finish presenting his case due to the time constraints.

"I don't know if our timeline allows for all of us to leave this building, go to a property, investigate a property and return," said Election Board President Katie Bowen.

Reading is thinking with someone else's head instead of ones own. — *Arthur Schopenhauer*

Lenten 'Quiet Morning' at the Episcopal Church of the Mediator

The Arts of Mediator will have a Quiet Day from 9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Saturday, March 14, at the Episcopal Church of the Mediator at 14280 Red Arrow Highway in Harbert.

The theme for the day is "Relaxation, Reconciliation, and Restoration." The morning will begin with a continental breakfast leading into a guided Visio Divina session. Afterward, there will be time for self-exploration of the labyrinth (weather permitting), art exploration, and quiet prayer in the Chapel. Consider setting some time aside for yourself during Lent to gather in quiet contemplation. There is no cost to attend but freewill donations are always welcome.

Please register by contacting the church office at 269-469-1441 or at office@mediatorharbert.com or mjrothfarm@gmail.com.

— STAFF REPORTS

Alcohol related crashes into vehicles and garage

BY STAN MADDUX

A man is accused of driving drunk when he crashed into two parked vehicles then a garage at a house in northern La Porte County.

Brenda Depoy, 65, said she was smoking a cigarette inside her attached garage on the night of Feb. 27.

Suddenly, the suspect crashed through her overhead garage door and hit the back end of a third vehicle parked inside the garage.

Fortunately, she was away and to the side of the 16-foot-wide garage door when the vehicle busted through it, missing her by just a few feet.

"I began screaming for my husband. It's a mess," she said.

Kyle Barnes, 32, of Rolling Prairie is charged in La Porte Superior Court 3 with Class A misdemeanor operating while intoxicated.

His alleged blood alcohol level was .19 percent, well above the .08 percent legal limit.

According to La Porte County Police, the accident happened about 8:30 p.m. in the 5100 block of N. 600 East.

Barnes told investigators he was talking to his girlfriend, who was in the front passenger seat, when he lost control of the vehicle.

According to police, Barnes said he tried correcting his steering but was unable to.

He went on to strike the pick-up trucks in the driveway before crashing into the garage.

David Depoy, 67, said he was lying on a couch in the living room and didn't see the suspect coming.

However, the sound of impact quickly got his attention.

"I heard him when he hit," he said.

Depoy said numerous bricks from the exterior of the garage were left strewn inside and outside the structure.

He said some of the exterior bricks from his residence were also knocked loose.

One of the outside walls on the garage was bowed, forcing him to use plywood to close gaps in the structure.

The dust from the crashes hadn't settled yet when Depoy said he began asking himself "why me. You know what I mean?"

Depoy said he's already been in touch with his insurance company about paying for all of the repairs.

He believes one or two of the vehicles will be ruled a total loss.

Police said Barnes admitted to consuming four whiskey drinks in one hour at a nearby bar prior to the crash.

He was also given a summons to appear in court on a charge of failing to provide proof of insurance on his vehicle.

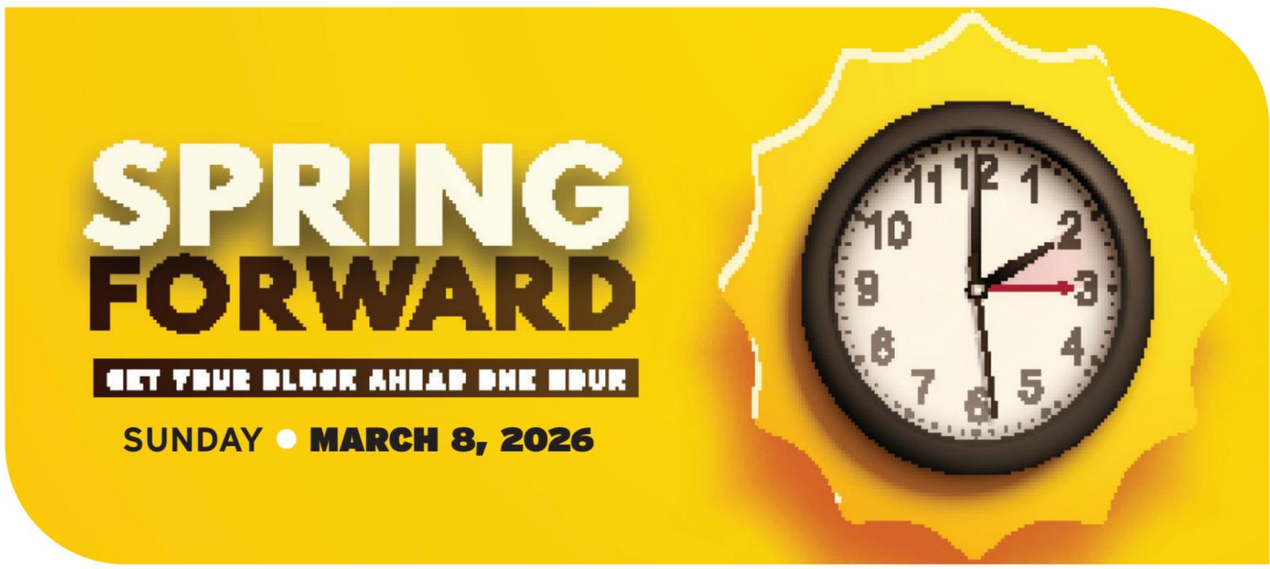
ANNUAL CORNED BEEF-OFF COMING THIS MONTH

David's Delicatessen & Coffee in New Buffalo will be hosting the 16th annual Corned Beef-Off from noon to 4 p.m. Sunday, March 15.

For a $25 entrance fee, guests are invited to enjoy all-you-can-eat corned beef from nearly two dozen different suppliers. Beer, wine, soft drinks, and pours from the False Front's massive Irish whiskey collection will be available for purchase.

Put on some loose-fitting green clothes and join the folks at David's for an afternoon filled with salted briskets and Irish American good cheer.

Proceeds from the event will benefit the good work done by Harbor Country Mission. — STAFF REPORTS



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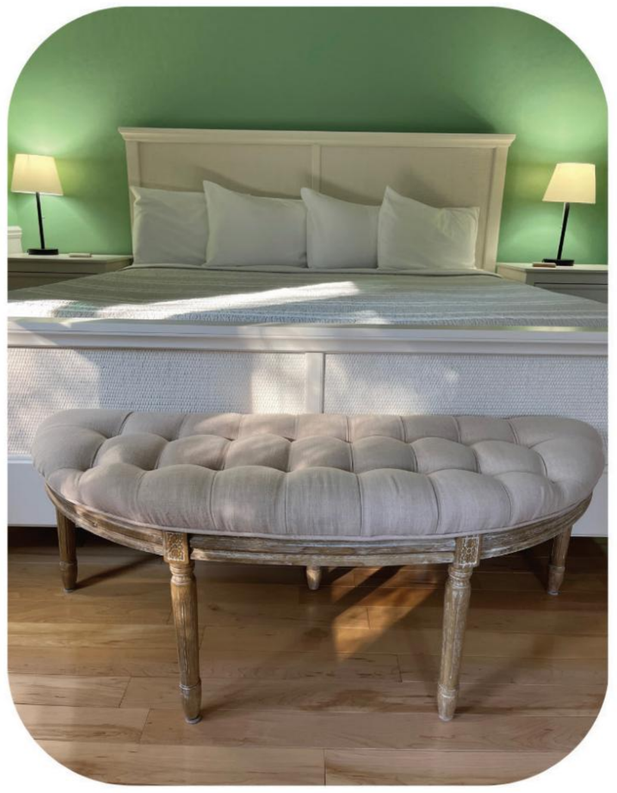

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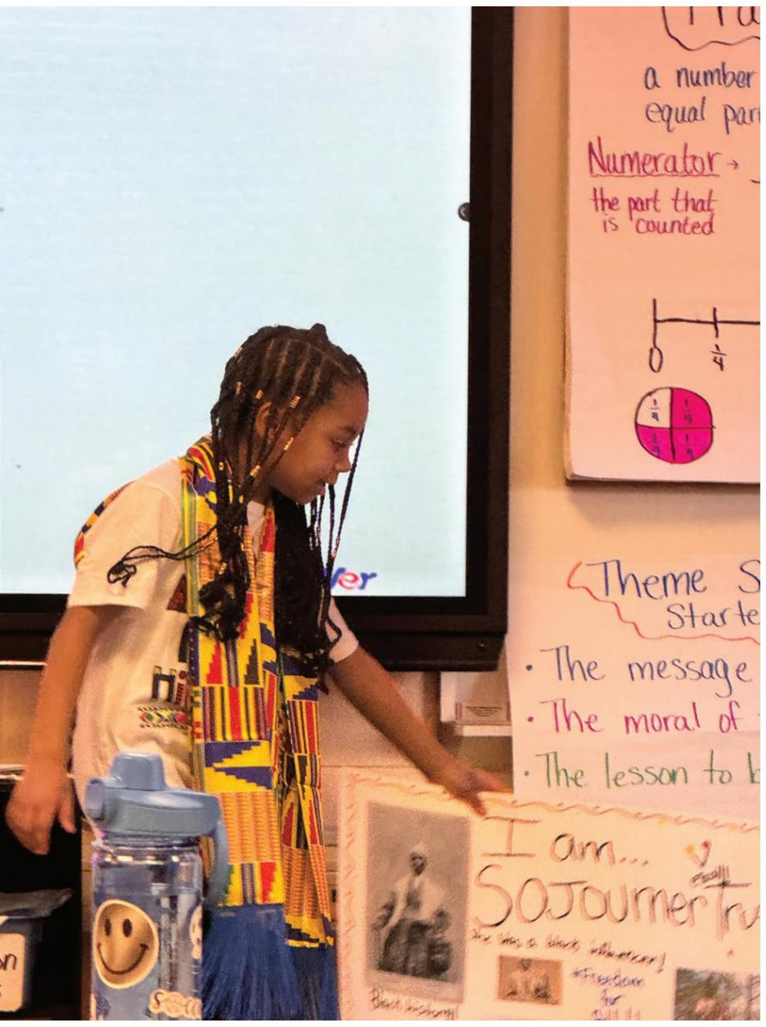

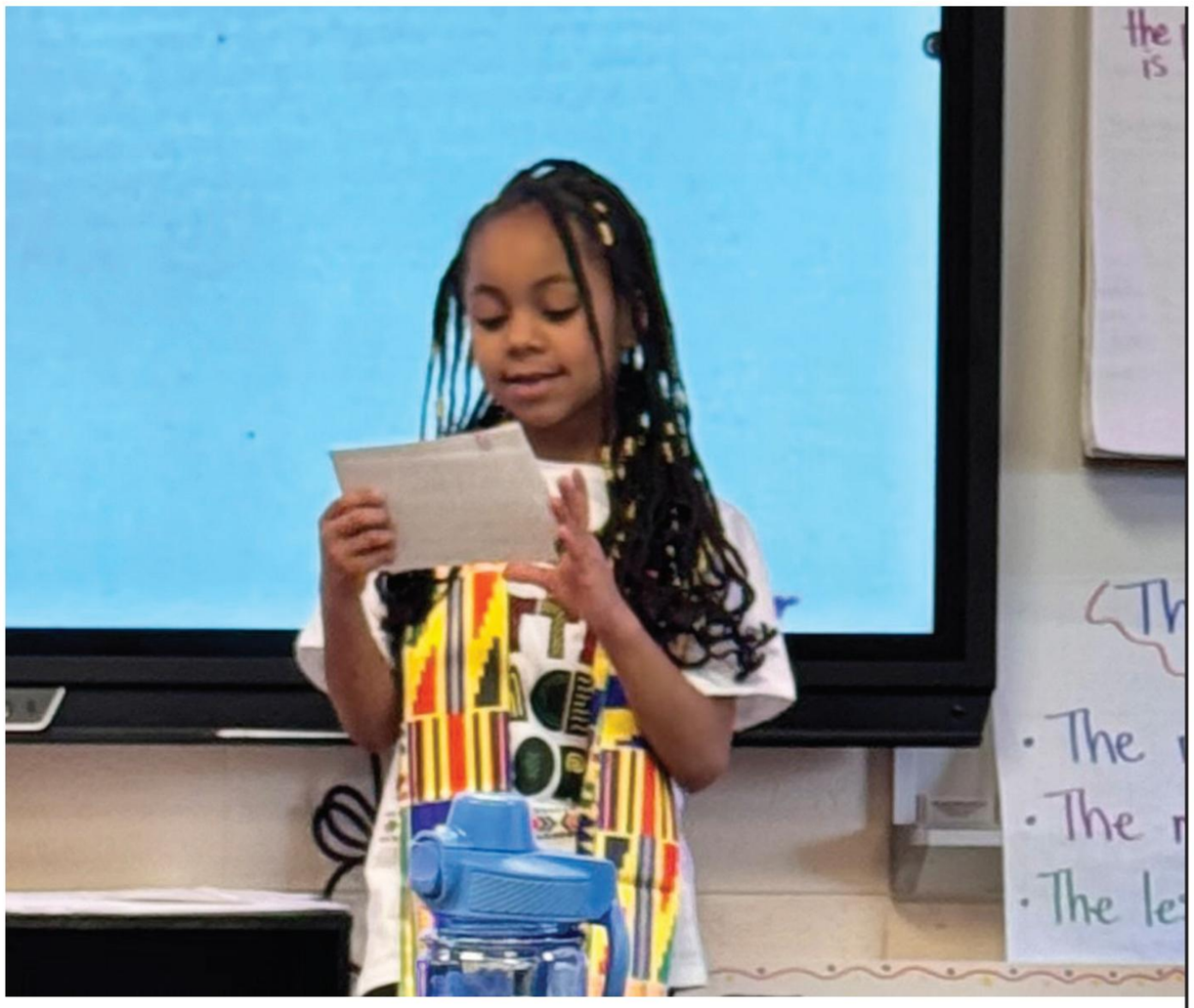

Special Black History Month presentation by Mary Jane Bergerson

BY KRISTIN FATOUROS

Each February marks Black History Month, a time for Americans to learn about and celebrate the significant contributions of African Americans to our country. To close out the month, on Thursday, February 26, Mary Jane Bergerson came to school ready to teach her classmates about three Black Americans who have inspired her.

Equipped with visuals, facts, and stories, Bergerson presented to her third-grade classmates and teacher, Mrs. Schultz, at New Buffalo Elementary. Principal Melissa Lijewski also came down to learn from Bergerson.

Bergerson had done independent research and decided to share about Beyoncé, Sojourner Truth, and Benjamin Banneker. She quoted Beyoncé, who said, "If everything was perfect you would never learn, you would never grow."

Bergerson is committed to continuing to learn, stating, "I want to keep learning about my Black culture, celebrate my heritage, and learn about Black superstars that I look up to, like Sojourner Truth." The quote she shared from Truth was, "I am not afraid to stand alone."

At age eight, Bergerson said she was happy to present because she wanted to help show her class "why Black History Month is important, learn about different people and their history, and maybe learning will help stop people from being unkind to each other."

Bergerson informed classmates about Beyoncé's philanthropy, Truth's dedication and strength, and Banneker's commitment to civil rights and ending slavery, noting that "slavery is opposite to American ideals."

She closed her presentation by saying:

"Racism is hurtful because no one can control their skin color, and it doesn't make me less beautiful or not equal. We are all strong and beautiful." At eight years old, Bergerson's message echoed the spirit of Black History Month itself: learning from the past so we can treat each other better today.

MHS PAWCTION GOING ON NOW

The sixth annual Cabin Fever Pawction, an online silent auction to support the care of Michiana Humane Society's shelter pets, is going on now until Sunday, March 8.

The Cabin Fever Pawction is more than a fundraiser; it's a testament to the community's compassionate spirit and a critical source of support for our shelter pets.

The auction showcases an array of unique experiences, items, and services donated by local businesses.

Items include vacation getaways, golfing, custom pet portraits, VIP shelter experiences, fitness packages, pet items, group experiences and much more. All items have been generously donated by individuals and businesses.

New items include an exceptional golf experience at Sand Creek Country Club, a four-some package complete with carts.

Some of the most popular offers have returned, like the Goat Hike at Verdant Hollow Farms, where you and nine friends can hike the wooded trails at a goat dairy farm in Buchanan while interacting with and learning about the goats.

Funds raised from the auction will go toward the almost 1,000 animals that Michiana Humane Society will care for in 2026.

To bid on items, visit www.michianapets.org. — STAFF REPORTS

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Bison in nail biter win district title in boys' basketball

FALL SHORT IN REGIONAL BASKETBALL OPENER

BY STAN MADDUX

The New Buffalo High School boys' basketball team won the District 4 championship in a thriller against Eau Claire, which stormed back from an 18 point second quarter deficit.

The Bison won 69-63 on Friday, Feb. 27, at River Valley High School, where the post-season tournament was played.

New Buffalo led the entire way until the Beavers mostly on three-point shooting and turnovers converted into points evened the score with two minutes left in the game.

New Buffalo Head Coach Nate Tripp said the Beavers' full court pressure defense contributed to the rally by wearing down his players in the second half.

The Bison still had a 10-point lead early in the fourth quarter, but a quick burst of consecutive three-point baskets helped the Beavers get back into the game.

"They can shoot the lights out. You get a hand in their face and they're still hitting it," he said.

New Buffalo seemed to look nearly defeated when the Beavers off a steal tied the game, but senior Trevor James after fouled put the Bison up for good by making both of his free throw shots.

The game was practically sealed with less than 30 seconds left when senior Lucas Forker, after making a free throw, missed his second attempt from the line.

However, sophomore Colten Lijewski going up for the rebound tipped the ball into the net.

Eau Claire, after missing their next field goal attempt, fouled senior Nick Haskins, who made both free throws with seven seconds remaining on the clock.

Haskins said the speed and quickness of the Beavers gave them problems, but he was never worried about the outcome.

He's among the players who played on the varsity team as freshmen and won just a single game during a major rebuilding year.

The team kept becoming more competitive and made it to the District 4 championship game last year but lost to Michigan Lutheran.

"It's just a cool story. We started low and then we're here now. We're winners. We're champions," Haskins said.

Haskins finished with 12 points.

The strategy for the Bison was to take advantage of the Beavers' lack of height by feeding the ball as much as possible to their 6'4" center Forker, who dominated with 25 points and 17 rebounds.

Forker, who predicted victory before the game, was double teamed and forced to go strong up to the rim for many of his points.

"I feel great. I feel so good. I'm so happy for my team," he said.

James had 15 points.

He said the victory was especially sweet after last year's loss in the District 4 title game.

"It feels great," he said.

Lijewski contributed eight points, while senior Sam Tripp added four points and senior John Bradshaw had three points.

New Buffalo scored the first eight points of the game and led 33-15 late in the second quarter but the Beavers off steals scored six quick points to trail by 11 points at halftime.

The team led at halftime but lost in the first round of the regionals Tuesday, March 3.

The Bison were defeated by Colon High School 50-43 at Marcellus.

Colon, with three players at well over 6 feet in height, focused on stopping the leading scorer for New Buffalo, Forker, who was held to just 12 points.

Forker had 25 points when the Bison won the District 4 title over Eau Claire by six points on Feb. 28.

The Bison also had problems with turnovers and giving Colon second chance points at critical moments in the second half from offensive rebounds.

Tripp said the loss had more to do with his players beating themselves from lack of execution on both sides of the court especially in the third quarter when Colon outscored the Bison 16 to 8.

He also felt his players never regained their composure after Colon came back from an eight point second quarter deficit to trail by two points at halftime.

"We just kind of panicked and freaked out. We've never shown this whole year that we can play with poise, and it really cost us," he said.

The Bison, trailing by six points at the start of the fourth quarter, pulled to within three points with about three minutes left on the clock on a jump shot from the corner by Lijewski.

However, New Buffalo could not get any closer.

James led the Bison with 17 points.

Lijewski added 10 points while senior Sam Tripp contributed five points.

Colon improved to 21-4 while New Buffalo, winners in 12 of their last 15 games, finished 16-9 on the season.

From the Bleachers

COLUMN BY KURT MARGGRAF IN CHICAGO

On Sunday, March 8th, we move the clocks forward one hour.

After we get over the loss of an hours sleep, we begin to reap the benefits of the time change.

The sun setting an hour later is the biggest immediate advantage, and as of Sunday the sun won't set until almost 7 p.m.

Back in the day, this extra hour of sunlight meant that youngsters could play outside after school. Baseball players in the northern part of the country finally have the opportunity to practice outdoors and try to catch up to their counterparts in the south.

The southern part of the country is currently a hotbed of MLB teams and players. Spring training is in full swing as players prepare for the World Baseball Classic and eventually the regular season.

This season is particularly important because the collective bargaining agreement ends at the end of the year, so the chance that there will be no baseball in 2027 is real.

Chicago could be a fun city for baseball this year, as both of our teams seemed to improve themselves during the offseason.

The White Sox have lost more than 100 games each of the last three seasons. Over the last 10 years they've won more than they lost only twice and added another 100 loss season to make it four. They've had plenty of high draft choices because of their poor records and I think they may finally be ready to approach the middle of the pack this year.

On the other hand, the Cubs have participated in the playoffs the last couple of years and it looks like they're making every effort to make it three.

Since the season ended, the Cubs have added third baseman Alex Bregman and pitcher Edward Cabrera, and even though they lost Kyle Tucker to the Dodgers, the incomers should more than offset his loss.

I'm having a love/hate relationship with baseball and all the shenanigans going on between the players and the owners.

The hate part revolves around not being able to understand how both sides have zero trust in the other side. In my opinion, agents and unions are most responsible for the antagonism that exists.

Owners refuse to disclose how much money they truly make and players now believe that they are owed multiple millions of dollars every year. If the owners would be honest and the players were realistic, the fan experience could be so much better.

Families could afford to go to games, a beer wouldn't cost an arm and a leg, investments could be made in the minor leagues and youth baseball, and the game could be prospering instead of losing many fans to other sports.

I believe lack of competitive balance is more of a problem than the "slowness" of the game. Baseball is a great sport, especially in Chicago.

Friedrich Nietzsche said, "Those who dance are thought to be insane by those who can't hear the music."

Be kind. Talk to you next week. Peace, love, and happiness.

I've been boxing since I was 7 years old.
— Ryan Garcia

Raiders win post season opener in girls' basketball

BY STAN MADDUX

The Red Arrow Raiders won their District tournament opener Monday in girls' high school basketball.

The Raiders defeated Bridgman 32-31 at Cassopolis High School, which is hosting the tournament this year.

The game was close from start to finish except for a moment in the fourth quarter, when the Raiders led by eight points.

"It was a pretty tight game all throughout," said Raiders Head Coach Jason Alexander.

The Raiders lost to Bridgman by five points in January.

Coming up big for the Raiders was sophomore Rylee Rudolph, who played mostly on the junior varsity team this season but came off the bench for the varsity squad in the tournament to score six points and grab four steals.

Alexander credited junior point guard Laney Strother for helping to keep the team in the game with her shooting and focused with her leadership on the court.

Strother finished with nine points.

Sophomore Addison Lynch led the Raiders with 10 points, six rebounds and six steals.

Junior Shyann Spaulding added five points and 10 rebounds.

Alexander said he really liked the way his players worked the ball until finding an open shooter and supported each other.

"I think we had a really good performance as far as team wise. Everybody contributed," he said.

The victory was a goal for the team after losing in the first round of the district tournament last year.

The Raiders (7-11) play again in Wednesday's semi-finals against Brandywine.

Brandywine defeated the Raiders 58 to 11 about six weeks ago.

"We're looking forward to the challenge. Anything can happen," he said.

Community representatives break ground on Kohn Park

MORE THAN A GREEN SPACE

BY FRANCESCA SAGALA

Harbor Country Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Kimberlee Wendt celebrates Kohn Park's groundbreaking

Chikaming Township Supervisor David Bunte speaks to a crowd at the groundbreaking

After months of fundraising, grant-seeking and community support, construction on what Chikaming Township Supervisor David Bunte called a "place that will shape our community for generations" has commenced.

"Today, as we break ground on Kohn Park, we're not just turning over a patch of earth – we're planting the seeds for memories, for laughter and for the quiet moments that make life in Sawyer so rich," Bunte said at the park's groundbreaking ceremony Friday, Feb. 27.

The Chikaming Township Board approved a contract with LuAva Inc. for the park's construction, which was scheduled to begin March 2.

Per a previous press release, plans for the future park, which will be located at 5844 Sawyer Road in Sawyer, include an interactive children's music play installation; a sculptural shade shelter designed for concerts, performances, and small community events; native plant landscaping and pollinator gardens; a mix of seating types for rest, reading and gathering; a bike repair station, water refill fountain and other amenities that support active use and a whimsical custom bronze sculpture crafted by a local artist.

Besides being a green space, Bunte said that parks are "where kids learn to rides bikes, where neighbors catch up on sunny mornings, where we find a little peace away from the rush of daily life."

"Kohn Park will be all of that and more – a place where our community can come together and grow," Bunte said.

Kohn Park is named in honor of the late Jerry Kohn and his wife, Bev. The Kohn family donated the property back to the township after demolishing Sawyer's original 1950s fire station that once sat at the site.

Jerry, who passed away in October 2023, established Corvette Central in Sawyer in 1975. Other community involvement included being a founding member of the Friends of New Troy and participating on the Galien River Sanitation Department and the Horizon Bank boards and in Chikaming Township politics.

Bev Kohn shares her appreciation for Kohn Park

Chikaming Parks Director Joe Martin thanks everyone's support for Kohn Park

Michelle Kelly, founding principal for Upland Design, speaks at the groundbreaking

SMRC Director of Membership Sarah Spoonholtz speaks at the groundbreaking

Joe Martin, director of parks and recreation for the township, said that the Kohns' donation is a "gift that will serve future generations."

"We are proud to represent all four hamlets within Chikaming Township, including Sawyer, where today we celebrate new growth and new energy," he said.

"Kohn Park is about community, connection and the future of Sawyer," he said, adding that "the best is yet to come."

Calling him an "iconic driver in the community," Harbor Country Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Kimberlee Wendt said that, whether he was "encouraging a new business to open its doors here or enticing people to make Harbor Country home," Jerry "always took the time to sit down and chat."

"Both Bev and Jerry wanted all those around them to thrive.... This park will give people the opportunity to do all of that and so much more. They can take a seat and commune with each other in a place that will nurture those types of relationships for the community of Sawyer," she said.

Having been born and raised in Southwest Michigan, Southwest Michigan Regional Chamber Membership Director Sarah Spoonholtz said that she carries "a wide range of core memories from communities across our region."

She congratulated "those who played a role in bringing it to life."

"I look forward to celebrating the completion of Kohn Park with all of you and to seeing friends and families gather here, creating their own lasting memories of our community," she said.

In addition to the Kohn family, Bunte thanked John and Debbie Chipman, Patronicity, the Berrien Community Foundation and Michigan Department of Natural Resources.

Last winter, the township was awarded a DNR Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) development grant in the amount of $327,700, which is nearly half of the park's cost.

The township was awarded the "For Good Grant" from Berrien Community Foundation in the amount of $5,000 for Kohn Park.

Bunte said Tara Heiser and Julie Strating from Changemaker Studio assisted in the fundraising campaign.

Martin thanked John Tyrpak, David Buckland and the Chikaming parks team for helping care for the space.

Bunte also thanked community leaders, planners, donors, workers and residents, who "helped make this day possible."

"Your commitment ensures that Sawyer continues to grow not just in size but in spirit. Let's move forward together, break ground with pride and look ahead with excitement to all that Kohn Park will become," Bunte said.

Michelle Kelly, Joe Martin, David Bunte, Bev Kohn, Kimberlee Wendt and Sarah Spoonholtz break ground on Kohn Park

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MARCH 5, THURSDAY:
- Music Box Films Tasting Room Movie Night at Dablon Vineyards 6:10pm [Free]
- Create A Ceramic Leaf Tray at Chill Hill Winery 7pm [Tickets]

MARCH 6, FRIDAY:
- 2026 Oscar Nominated Short Films at the Vickers in Three Oaks – various times all weekend [Tickets]
- March Mannequins in downtown St. Joseph 6pm [Free]
- Henhouse Prowlers live at The Acorn 8pm [Tickets]

MARCH 7, SATURDAY:
- Day of the Dude at Peat's Cider Social 12-6pm [Reserve a Lane]
- Fiber Fusion Crafting at Sandpiper in Bridgman 12-3pm [Reserve a Spot]
- Barrel & Bloom: International Women's Day Event at Round Barn Winery & Estate 12-5pm [Free]
- Hike & Tick Control Workshop at Goldberry Woods 1pm [Free]
- The Gentle Art of Hygge at Fernwood Botanical Garden 1-3pm [Tickets]
- Dig the Dunes Maker's [Crafting] Trail in Northwest Indiana 11am – 5pm [Tickets]
- Lakeside Inn Murder Mystery Dinner 7:30pm [Tickets]

MARCH 8, SUNDAY:
- Kids Fox Painting Class at Baroda Soda 3pm [Tickets]
- The Pincher's High Voltage Heist Film Screening at CCFF in Sawyer 2pm [Free]

MARCH 10, TUESDAY:
- Mackinac Bridge, Then and Now at the Bridgman Public Library 6pm [Free]

MARCH 11, WEDNESDAY:
- Craft Time at the New Buffalo Township Library 9am [Free]

MARCH 12, THURSDAY:
- Full Tilt Goes BANANAS! through Sunday at Full Tilt in LaPorte [Free]
- PechaKucha at the Box Factory for the Arts in St. Joseph 7pm [Tickets]

MARCH 13, FRIDAY:
- Taylor Swift Trivia Night at Hummingbird Lounge 6pm [More info]
- 10th Annual St. Patrick's Day Party at Watermark Brewing Co. in Stevensville 6:30-11pm [More info]
- An evening with TOTO at the Four Winds Casino New Buffalo 9pm [Tickets]
- Chikaming Open Lands presents Storywalk on the Preserves Opening Day (through May 25th) [More Info]

MARCH 14, SATURDAY:
- St. Paddy's Day Pub Crawl in Benton Harbor 12-5pm [Tickets]
- Paddywagon Pub Crawl hosted by The St. Joe Club in Michigan City 1-8pm [Tickets]
- St. Patrick's Day Party at Sonny D's New Buffalo 7pm [More info]

MARCH 15, SUNDAY:
- Lucky Brunch at The Heron Bistro in Michigan City 10am-2pm [Tickets]
- Annual Corned Beef-Off David's Delicatessen New Buffalo 12-4pm [$25]
- St. Patrick's Trivia at Round Barn Brewery 1-3pm [Free]

MARCH 16, MONDAY:
- Jazz Night at Shoreline Brewery 7pm [More Info]

MARCH 18, WEDNESDAY:
- Cowboy Junkies at the Acorn 7:30pm [Tickets]

MARCH 19, THURSDAY:
- Country Line Dancing at Kankakee Live in New Buffalo 7:30pm [Free]

MARCH 20, FRIDAY:
- The Chemistry of Wine at Lake Michigan College 6pm [Tickets]
- Spring Wreath Workshop, Section House 6pm [Tickets]

MARCH 21, SATURDAY:
- Annual St. Patrick's Day 5k Color Run/ Walk at Notre Dame Catholic School in Michigan City 8am [Sign up]
- Lakeshore Bourbon Festival at Solarium in Stevensville 1pm, 4pm or 7pm [Tickets]
- Spring Awakening Yoga, Reiki, and Sound Journey at Dancing Feet Yoga 6pm [Sign up]
- Spring Equinox Transformational Breath & Sound Healing Journey at Skybird Yoga 5pm [Sign up]
- Saint Joseph's Day Bonfire at River St. Joe 6pm [Free]

MARCH 22, SUNDAY:
- Spring Artisan Market at Sonny D's 11am [More Info]
- A Day Late and A Dollar Short St. Patrick's Day Celebration at Free Run Cellars 3pm [Free]

MARCH 25, WEDNESDAY:
- Presentation on Native Plants at Berrien County Conservation District 2pm [Free]

MARCH 26, THURSDAY:
- Adult Craft Class – Pollinator Water Stations at the Buchanan District Library 11am [Free]

A Writer's Life...

DURING THE GOLDEN AGE OF TELEVISION ANIMATION

BY JACK OLESKER

An Interesting Detour

The last thing I expected to hear from Mattel's Kaaren Lee Brown, Debra Galliani and Lori was that my new project was going to be a live action video game. I was okay with the idea of live action as opposed to animation, as I'd written my share of live action scripts. But writing for a video game was a whole new creature and, honestly, one I wasn't comfortable with.

Not to be deterred, the Mattel execs dove into their presentation. Kaaren explained Mattel was exploring video games. My later research would reveal Mattel had been active in the video game arena for a number of years.

In 1979 Mattel launched their Intellivision game console. A shortage of key chips led to initially low sales, but in 1980 Mattel sold out of the 175,000 game consoles it manufactured. In 1981 sales leapt to over a million units (!) and what began as a handful of staffers in a gaming division ultimately rose to over 1,800 (!, again). Profits were a staggering $100 million, $362 million in 2026 dollars (!...Ok, for the last time).

Mattel had snared twenty percent video game market share – "exploring video games", indeed -- challenging video game industry leader Atari. But problems with their keyboards and a flood of competing video games soon resulted in plummeting sales and the untimely demise of their video game division.

Thankfully, the project I was to work on had nothing to do with Mattel's ill-fated game console. Rather, it was a standalone video game named Predicaments that would be a videocassette that could be inserted into any existing VCR. Kaaren and Debra laid out the broad strokes for the project – a sort of interactive video game that was to be a blend of a steamy, tongue-in-cheek Days of Our Lives-type soap opera and the board game Clue. I was excited to learn Mattel had secured legendary comedian Joan Rivers to serve as Predicaments' on-camera narrator, with Gordon Jump (WKRP Cincinnati) in the game's lead role, supported by renowned character actress Lu Leonard (Married... with Children, Who's the Boss?, Get Smart).

It also intrigued me that Predicaments would be interactive, game players providing individual and different answers to questions posed to them determining each game's dramatic plotline and eventual outcome. This would be accomplished by cleverly taping four or five different possible 'outcomes' to each question posed.

When Kaaren asked what I thought, I said, "Sounds complicated. But I love a challenge."

Kaaren looked to Lori as Lori said, "I told you." Kaaren and Debra nodded, then went on with the particulars of the assignment. My script would create the world the game took place in – an eerie mansion, the characters, relationships and motives as well as the opportunities and means they would have to accomplish their goals.

It sounded like an old fashioned mystery novel to me,and since I'd launched my career in writing through the publication of my first mystery novel, No Place Like Home (G.P. Putnam's Sons) which went on to became a bestseller, MGM buying the film rights ("It ain't bragging if you done it." Dizzy Dean), this was right up my alley.

Although I'd preferred to have had an animated television series to be working on, a live action project with mystery overtones seemed like a nice change of pace.

As it turned out, it wasn't going to be all violins and roses...

HOROSCOPE

MARCH 5-11, 2026

AS INTERPRETED BY SANDY "STAR" BENDT

ARIES MARCH 21—APRIL 19

This is the time to stand out from the crowd and be who you are. You may feel singled out or challenged by others but it will help you see where your spirit truly resonates. Let your uniqueness be a strength and be proud of the fact that your strength is connected to your roots and your past experiences.

TAURUS APRIL 20—MAY 20

Being a mystery is what will set you apart from competitors and staying guarded will allow you to get more information from your peers. It's all about working behind the scenes and taking care of business without making a fuss this week. Be foxy by watching people and blending in.

GEMINI MAY 21—JUNE 21

You may be called out by friends or put on the spot to stand behind something you may not fully support or want. It is important to be crystal clear about your intentions and what you truly support or you may be associated with something that could damage your social standing and pocket book.

CANCER JUNE 22—JULY 22

This is the time to be proactive and take responsibility when necessary. Don't wait for things to unfold to take action. Prepare now and you will be on point when people try to put you to the test. It is important to follow through now and create what you have been envisioning. You know your talents. Do it.

LEO JULY 23—AUGUST 22

The vibe radiating your way is all about finding peace after drama or emotionally driven interactions. Sometimes dramatic situations are unavoidable and it's more about how you recover and what you do afterwards to remedy the problem. The important thing is to restructure things in a way that gives you more freedom.

VIRGO AUGUST 23—SEPTEMBER 22

It is important to stick with plans and work together with your partner this week. This is about deepening your connection by following through and having fun while you complete something together. It might feel like the end of an era but it is really creating something that will live on and both of you will be proud of it.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23—OCTOBER 22

This is the time for honoring a job well done. It's about recognition and rewards finally coming through. You will be getting feedback but it may feel more like being questioned. You may have some explaining to do but it will only confirm the lengths you went through to complete things.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23—NOVEMBER 21

The energy coming your way this week is pushing you to create something big and to expand your creative energy into new projects. It's time to move on to what's in front of you. Let the past be something you can draw upon for love and inspiration but don't let it hold you back. Let it propel you.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22—DECEMBER 21

There will be a very happy and secure feeling coming your way this week and you will have the opportunity to spend time with family and close relatives. Use this opportunity to it's fullest by creating something special for all to enjoy, like an old family recipe or putting together old photos of your ancestors.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22—JANUARY 19

This is the time when you will experience significant breakthroughs with your partner and the people you work with on a daily basis. So, keep brainstorming and sharing ideas the solution is coming. This is about finding the right space where all parties feel inspired and safe to go completely off the cuff.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20—FEBRUARY 18

When you are forever the student in abundance and acceptance, the lessons in life will always about what is valuable and worth pursuing. Do your homework this week. Take stock of what you have and what you would like to have. What have you used the most and what has served you well? Honor the past.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19—MARCH 20

You have some lucky stars shining on you now so, go ahead and get excited because it is go time. Don't wait for people to reach out. Make the first move. Trust that the hard-work you completed over the past year will be recognized and the connections you made with people will pay off now.

Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a harder battle.
— Plato

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Sudoku

Fill in the grid so that every row, column and 3x3 box contains the numbers 1 through 9.

2				8	4			9
1			9		7			6
	6				3	4	8	
		8				7		
						8	9	
		6	7					3
		7		4			3	
	9							
	1							2

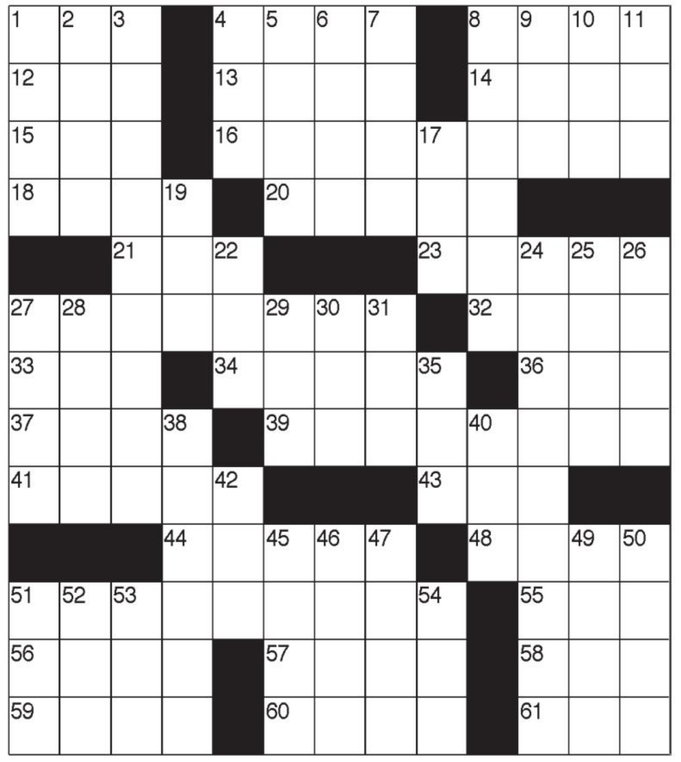
CROSSWORD PUZZLE

ACROSS

1 Energy
4 Shelter (Fr.)
8 Pelvic bones
12 Botanist Gray
13 Madam
14 Spiders' nests
15 Fiber knot
16 Boor
18 Son of Hera
20 Weakly colored (pref.)
21 Royal Air Force (abbr.)
23 West Pointer
27 Colin
32 French art group
33 Fiddler crab genus
34 Foreign in origin
36 Cluster of fibers
37 Luxuriant
39 Gird
41 Animal sound
43 Before common era (abbr.)
44 Old World moles
48 Russ. despot
51 Cog (2 words)
55 To be announced (abbr.)
56 Tamarisk
57 Father of Cordelia
58 Belonging to (suf.)
59 Direct
60 Amphibian (abbr.)
61 Greek letter

DOWN

1 Site of Hannibal's defeat
2 Elbe tributary
3 Pulp (2 words)
4 Ambassador (abbr.)
5 Semitic deity
6 Uncommon
7 Fruit
8 Raid
9 52 (Rom. numeral)
10 Mountain on Crete
11 Own (Scot.)
17 Atl. Coast Conference (abbr.)
19 Adage
22 Federal Housing Admin. (abbr.)
24 Pas (2 words)
25 Noble (Ger.)
26 Record
27 Corm
28 Eye (pref.)
29 Island (Fr.)
30 Malleable metal
31 Eur. Economic Community (abbr.)
35 Bird's beak
38 Odium
40 Receipt (abbr.)
42 Knot lace
45 Mascagni heroine
46 Ode
47 Nipa palm
49 Down with (Fr., 2 words)
50 Hindu queen
51 Galatians (abbr.)
52 Summer (Fr.)
53 According to (2 words)
54 Her Royal Highness (abbr.)



OBITUARIES

Carl Andrew Rodgers, Jr.
1942-2026

Carl Andrew Rodgers, Jr., 83, of Galien, died peacefully, Wednesday, February 11, 2026, surrounded by his family.

His life began March 22, 1942 in Niles, Michigan, the youngest of two children born to Carl and Bessie Rodgers. He married Peggy Jo Callander July 4, 1961 in Galien, Michigan. She preceded him in death.

Carl enjoyed good music and doing all kinds of work. His favorite sport was politics. Carl was involved in the automotive industry for most of his life, working for Studebaker and going on to run Carl's Custom Craft with his father and Galien Body Shop with his wife. They built their family home by hand.

Peggy was his light. His children and grandchildren were everything.

Living uprightly was very important to him, and he passed this value on to his children and grandchildren.

Carl will be greatly missed by family and friends. He is survived by three sons, Carl (Cathy) Rodgers of Germany, Matthew Rodgers of Hartford, Joseph (Amanda) Rodgers of St. Joseph, four beloved grandchildren, Aaron Joseph, Seth Parker, Nicholas Ryan, and Luke Marshall all of St. Joseph.

He was preceded in death by his parents, his wife of over 54 years, and his sister Carol Helms.

Family and friends will gather Saturday, March 7, 2026 from 10:00 a.m. until the time of service at 11:00 a.m. in Calvary Tabernacle, 606 North Elm Street, Three Oaks, Michigan 49128.

Carl will be laid to rest with his wife in Forest Lawn Cemetery.

The family prefers contributions in memory of Carl be made to The Alzheimer's Association of America at www.alz.org.

Arrangements have been entrusted to Wagner Family Funerals Pobocik Chapel, Three Oaks. Please share a memory or a message online www.wagnercares.com.

Pamela Swenk
1955-2026

Pamela Swenk, 70, of Three Oaks, died peacefully, Monday, February 9, 2026, surrounded by her daughter, Liz and beloved dog, Jackman.

She was born on September 24, 1955, at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, the eldest of two children born to Bill and Terry Delling. Pam graduated from Western Michigan University and later settled in Grand Rapids Michigan where she met and married the love of her life, Kirk, on December 5, 1987. After 37 years of marriage he preceded her in death.

Pam was a force to be reckoned with in all aspects of her life. An organizer, a leader and always a generous supporter in everything she did.

Pam will be greatly missed by family, friends and colleagues. She is survived by her cherished daughter and son-in-law Liz and Jeff Huebner of Three Oaks, brother and sister-in-law, Chris and Connie Delling and nephews, Brian and Patrick Delling.

She was preceded in death by her parents.

The family will observe a private remembrance.

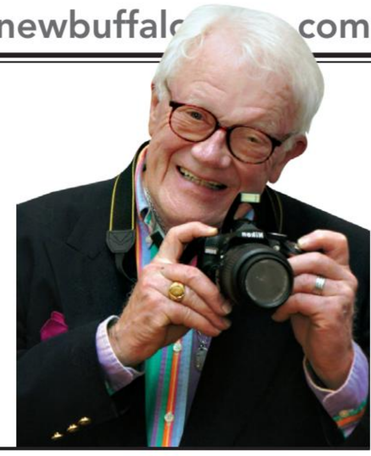
The family prefers contributions in memory of Pam to be made to several organizations. For more information, please contact Liz at lhuebner4124@gmail.com.

Arrangements have been entrusted to Wagner Family Funerals Pobocik Chapel, Three Oaks. Please share a memory or a message online at www.wagnercares.com.

A Day in the Life

TO MOLLY...

BY LAWRENCE VON EBELER



My brother's family recently lost their family pet for which I sent them a sculpted likeness of her and this poem.

To Molly:

Molly's life was not short of deep caring, from her family of love,

She too kept up with her family like they all came from above.

She was always a pleasure to have in your company too,

She could find comfort and pleasure in just staying with her darling family to do.

They all could likewise find appreciation for this great dog. without any strife,

She found pleasure everywhere, not the least of which was with her family life.

She was always thought of as another member of the family, and she had the stature of the family, she adored it too

When she was still young she was a part of the growing family of boys, and probably got used as a little donkey too.

But most of all she was the only daughter of Karen's male gang of four,

They were like peas in a pod with so many good years to live still more.

It was she and Karen with a a house full of men driving many crazy thrice,

They just picked the low hanging fruit and that made everything nice.

She was very feminine and did her "business" nicely out of sight,

She'd go all the way to the woods for that, she was so feminine and bright.

Karen and she were the girls together keeping the family kindness, it's true.

They were companions in their function as the girls true blue.

As she got older there was someone else that came into her life,

It was a fascinating man who was the kindest to her with no strife.

She ran after him in his tractors and tools that he drove,

She never stopped loving her role as the Princess of their cove.

She would maintain her stature as the protector of Jeff

She would run after all of his tools until nothing was left.

As she grew older, she lost some of her pep,

But she never tired of the Good ol' Dad Jeff.

When she became elderly and the illnesses came. Karen took care of her for whatever there was to keep her healthy and on track,

Spending thousands on her care was the least she could do for her friend, of so many years to pay back.

For all of those years she was one of the best things about the family, you could bet on that

She just had that sweet, quiet way of making her presence the best you'd ever had yet.

That was Molly, always so sweet and kind by nature,

She was to all of the family so lovely and so pure..

They will miss her forever and already feel the hole in their life,

Molly was a lovely person and her absence causes great strife.

For that and much more, Jeff made her a casket for which she will be secure,

and which all of the bad elements will stay away, to preserve her

like someone who was a personage so special for sure.

May She Rest in Peace,

The Family

Comments and opinions are appreciated, larryvonroscoe@gmail.com

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To Your Health

COLUMN BY KAREN EDWARDS ND

BLUE ZONES

There are five places worldwide that have the highest concentrations of people living to be over 100 years oldwithout chronic disease. They are rarely on medications, they are active, and live purposeful lives. These communities are close knit and have reasons to get up in the morning. They manage their stress naturally, and have healthy behaviors. Instead of gym workouts, Blue Zone people include movement into daily life through walking, gardening, and biking. What makes them special is a lifestyle, not genetics.

These five areas are Okinawa, Japan; Sardinia, Italy; Nicoya, Costa Rica; Ikaria, Greece; and Loma Linda, California

Surveys in all five blue zones found that 95 percent of 100-year-olds eat plant-based diets, including plenty of beans, legumes, tubers, garden vegetables and nuts. Beans are inexpensive, full of fiber and protein, and nutritionally rich. These are said to be eaten daily in these zones.

The centurions also eat a lot of complex carbohydrates. However, these are in the form of fruits and vegetables whole grains and sourdough breads, rather than in breads with yeast or processed and refined carbs.

People in blue zones suffer the same stresses that others do, but they have daily rituals that reduce stress and reverse the inflammation and anxiety associated with stress. They are said to have strong social circles, and are faith-based communities. Most importantly, they have a sense of purpose (a reason to wake up in the morning) This is central to their daily lives.

These people have strategies to keep themselves from overeating. They stop eating when they feel 80% full, rather than stuff themselves, to avoid overeating.

There is clinical evidence that saying a prayer before meals, eating slowly so that the full feeling can reach the brain, not eating in front of a screen, or eating with family, all lead to a decrease in food intake, and better digestion.Blue Zone people check all of these boxes.

In all five blue zones, people eat a large breakfast and a smaller lunch. Dinner is the smallest meal of the day. They don't eat after the sun goes down. This makes digestion strong and prevents disease.

Americans spend more than $100 billion annually on diet and exercise programs, health club memberships, and nutritional supplements. The Blue Zone people use diet and lifestyle as their health maintenance.

Many doctors laugh when a patient chooses to use nutrition as their healthcare treatment. We are in a time where drugs, surgery and disease maintenance are the only answer in the medical world. Maybe look into the Blue Zones a little deeper. We can certainly learn from them.

The lessons we can surely learn of the Blue Zones areto eat more legumes, reduce meat/sugar intake, stopeating when you are 80% full, and reduce stress by movement and community. They prove that making plant base the foundation of your diet is real. Your library will have blue zone diets and recipe books that can help you live like these wise people.

Disclaimer: Everything here is for nutritional education and is not meant to diagnose, treat prevent or cure. See your doctor when you have questions.

PET OF THE WEEK

QUEENIE

Queen is basically pure perfection in kitty form. She is about seven months old, weighs about nine pounds, and is spayed. She loves affection, whether giving or receiving. The longer you pet her, the more emphatic Queen is about kneading her paws and rolling over. Queenie's head bonks to make sure you don't stop petting her are among the most intentional we've seen. Make Queenie part of your home today.

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A sampling of donuts from Zo's Mini Donuts

Student athletes celebrate signing NIL deals with Zo's Mini Donuts (photo provided by Studio B Photography)

Zo's Mini Donuts sister duo, Zoey and Lydia Heyn

Zo's Mini Donuts signs first county NIL high school athlete deals

BY FRANCESCA SAGALA

Since launching in the summer of 2023, Zo's Mini Donuts has been very busy – expanding to three locations in southwest Michigan, going from having one pink truck parked in front of its original Sawyer location to five and growing its staff.

Now, the female-owned business has embarked on another venture: sponsoring some of Michigan's first high school NIL (name, image and likeness) deals.

Per a Michigan High School Athletic Association (MHSAA) press release, in January, the Representative Council of the Michigan High School Athletic Association "approved an expansion of personal branding activities (PBA) – also commonly referred to as Name-Image-Likeness (NIL) – allowing student-athletes at MHSAA member schools, effective immediately, to potentially benefit from such opportunities."

Zoey Heyn, a senior at Bridgman High School who, with her older sister, Lydia, a graduate of Michigan State University, are partners at Zo's, said that they jumped at signing student athletes as soon as the release came out.

"It's young entrepreneurship and that's the foundation of Zo's," Zoey said.

"It's literally allowing kids to be young entrepreneurs - when they previously were not allowed to," Lydia said.

Zo's signed the following student athletes to NIL deals: Brayden Holok and Sydney Thomas of Lakeshore schools, Brayden Favors of Niles, Kesean Hobbs and Zameir Clayton of Benton Harbor, Mackenna Price of Brandywine, Brady Belasco of Berrien Springs and Lainie Dorows of St. Joseph.

Previously, MHSAA had allowed some PBA opportunities, including the abilities for student-athletes to conduct camps, clinics and private lessons.

"The expanded policy allows student-athletes to capitalize on PBA through several more options as long as those activities are individual opportunities for individual students – while not disrupting competitive equity that would result from the creations of group activities including collectives and other pay-for-play opportunities now the norm at the collegiate level," the press release said.

Additional activities allowed by the new PBA policy include social media endorsements and promotions, personal appearances, photo sessions or autograph signings; modeling, advertising, merchandise, sports cards or apparel sales; and the use of a student's name, image or likeness in marketing materials.

"The way we use it is we compensate them (student athletes) for social media posts, so their followers see us," Zoey said, adding that social media is where Zo's gets "a lot of our traffic."

Zoey and Lydia said that Michiana Hoops was what recommended the students athletes to them.

"We saw it also as a way to say thank you and to show our support for a community that's shown us support," Lydia said of signing the deals.

Those who are interested in the rules and other details can visit www.mhssa.com.

Recently, Zo's has garnered regional and statewide recognition: It was named Small Business of the Year at the Southwest Michigan Regional Chamber Business Recognition event last month and has been recognized by Michigan Celebrates Small Business with a 2026 SBDC Best Small Business Award.

Zoey and Lydia said that they were "surprised and honored" to receive the SMRC award, as it was voted on live at the event. They look forward to making the trek to Michigan State University in April for the Best Small Business Award.

Upon graduation from high school, Zoey said she'll follow in Lydia's footsteps and attend MSU, where she got accepted into the Eli Broad College of Business and will probably study finance and minor in entrepreneurship.

Lydia said she's in real estate property management throughout the year and offseason, which involves working with short and long-term rentals.

Despite her college plans, Zoey said they will "never leave southwest Michigan," although they may one day expand to a year-round business. A Zo's truck will be parked at 200 West Buffalo Street in New Buffalo as well as 12816 Red Arrow Highway in Sawyer tgis sumer. Currently, they're on the hunt for another location in St. Joseph.

Last summer, they had 22 staff members and are looking for more this year.

The glazed, cinnamon and sugar and powder sugar donuts, which come from a secret family recipe, have gained quite the following in the area.

"The only people we can say thank you to is anyone who's tried a donut...If it weren't for Zo's family, we would never have made it," Lydia said.

"If you would've told me three years ago this would be our future, I would have thought you were lying...I can't believe this is where we are," Zoey said.

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